

TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2021

The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the Week of Prayer, for example around Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

Adapting the text

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

Using the Week of Prayer material

For churches and Christian communities which observe the Week of Prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.

Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the Week of Prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the "eight days", and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.

Communities which observe the Week of Prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days".

Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the Week of Prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.

Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's Church.

BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2021

Jn 15:1-17

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have

kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. (New Revised Standard Version)

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR 2021

Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit

(cf. Jn 15:5-9)

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021 was prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp. The theme that was chosen, "*Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit*", is based on John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community's vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the church and the human family.

In the 1930s a number of Reformed women from French-speaking Switzerland who belonged to a group known as the "Ladies of Morges" rediscovered the importance of silence in listening to the Word of God. At the same time they revived the practice of spiritual retreats to nourish their life of faith, inspired by the example of Christ who went apart to a lonely place to pray. They were soon joined by others who took part in regularly organized retreats in Grandchamp, a small hamlet near the shores of Lake Neuchâtel. It became necessary to provide a permanent presence of prayer and welcome for the growing number of guests and retreatants.

Today the community has fifty sisters, all women from different generations, church traditions, countries and continents. In their diversity the sisters are a living parable of communion. They remain faithful to a life of prayer, life in community and the welcoming of guests. The sisters share the grace of their monastic life with visitors and volunteers who go to Grandchamp for a time of retreat, silence, healing or in search of meaning.

The first sisters experienced the pain of division between the Christian churches. In this struggle they were encouraged by their friendship with Abbé Paul Couturier, a pioneer of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Therefore, from its earliest beginnings prayer for Christian unity was at the heart of the life of the community. This commitment, together with Grandchamp's fidelity to the three pillars of prayer, community life and hospitality, form the foundations of these materials.

To abide in God's love is to be reconciled with oneself

The French words for monk and nun (moine/moniale) come from the Greek *μόνος* which means alone and one. Our hearts, bodies and minds, far from being one, are often scattered, being pulled in several directions. The monk or nun desires to be one in his or herself and united with Christ. "Abide in me as I abide in you," Jesus tells us (Jn 15:4a). An integrated life presupposes a path of self-acceptance, of reconciliation with our personal and inherited histories.

Jesus said to the disciples, "abide in my love" (Jn 15:9). He abides in the love of the Father (Jn 15:10) and desires nothing other than to share this love with us: "I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (Jn 15:15b). Grafted into the vine, which is Jesus himself, the Father becomes our vinedresser who prunes us to make us grow. This describes what happens in prayer. The Father is the centre of our lives, who centres our lives. He prunes us and makes us whole, and whole human beings give glory to the Father.

Abiding in Christ is an inner attitude that takes root in us over time. It demands space to grow. It can be overtaken by the struggle for the necessities of life and it is threatened by the distractions, noise, activity and the challenges of life. In the turmoil of Europe in 1938, Geneviève Micheli, who would later become Mother Geneviève, the first mother of the community, wrote these lines which remain relevant today:

We live in a time that is both troubling and magnificent, a dangerous time where nothing preserves the soul, where rapid and wholly human achievements seem to sweep beings away ... And I think that our civilization will die in this collective madness of noise and speed, where no being can think ... We Christians, who know the full value of a spiritual life, have an immense responsibility and must realize it, unite and help each other create forces of calmness, refuges of peace, vital centres where the silence of people calls on the creative word of God. It is a question of life and death.

Abiding in Christ until we bear fruit

“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit” (Jn 15:8). We cannot bear fruit on our own. We cannot bear fruit separated from the vine. It is the sap, the life of Jesus flowing through us, that produces fruit. Remaining in Jesus’s love, remaining a branch of the vine, is what allows his life to flow through us.

When we listen to Jesus his life flows through us. Jesus invites us to let his word abide in us (John 15:7) and then whatever we ask will be done for us. By his word we bear fruit. As persons, as a community, as the entire church, we wish to unite ourselves to Christ in order to keep his commandment of loving one another as He has loved us (Jn 15:12).

Abiding in Christ, the source of all love, the fruit of communion grows

Communion with Christ demands communion with others. Dorotheus of Gaza, a monk in Palestine in the 6th century, expressed this in the following way:

Imagine a circle drawn on the ground, that is, a line drawn in a circle with a compass, and a centre. Imagine that the circle is the world, the centre is God, and the radii are the different paths or ways people live. When the saints, desiring to draw near to God, walk toward the middle of the circle, to the extent that they penetrate its interior, they draw closer to each other; and the closer they draw to each other, the closer they come to God. Understand that the same thing applies conversely, when we turn away from God and withdraw toward the outside. It then becomes obvious that the more we move away from God, the more we move away from each other, and the more we move away from each other, the more we also move away from God.

Moving closer to others, living together in community with others, sometimes people very different from ourselves, can be challenging. The sisters of Grandchamp know this challenge and for them the teaching of Brother Roger of Taizé is very helpful: “There is no friendship without purifying suffering. There is no love of one’s neighbour without the cross. The cross alone allows us to know the unfathomable depth of love.” Divisions among Christians, moving away from one another, are a scandal because it is also moving further away from God. Many Christians, moved to sorrow by this situation, pray fervently to God for the restoration of that unity for which Jesus prayed. Christ’s prayer for unity is an invitation to turn back to him and so come closer to one another, rejoicing in the richness of our diversity.

As we learn from community life, efforts at reconciliation are costly and demand sacrifice. We are sustained by the prayer of Christ, who desires that we might be one, as he is one with the Father so that the world may believe (cf. Jn 17:21).

Abiding in Christ the fruit of solidarity and witness grows

Though we, as Christians, abide in the love of Christ, we also live in a creation that groans as it waits to be set free (cf. Rom 8). In the world we witness the evils of suffering and conflict. Through solidarity with those who suffer we allow the Paschal mystery to bear fruit in us and the love of Christ to flow through us to our brothers and sisters and nurture hope in the world.

Spirituality and solidarity are inseparably linked. Abiding in Christ, we receive the strength and wisdom to act against structures of injustice and oppression, to fully recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters in humanity, and to be creators of a new way of living, with respect for and communion with all of creation.

The summary of the rule of life⁴ that the sisters of Grandchamp recite together each morning begins with the words “pray and work that God may reign”. Prayer and everyday life are not two separate realities but are meant to be united. All that we experience is meant to become an encounter with God.

For the eight days of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021, we propose a journey of prayer:

Day 1: Called by God: “You did not choose me but I chose you” (Jn 15:16a)

Day 2: Maturing internally: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn 15:4a)

Day 3: Forming one body: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12b)

Day 4: Praying together: “I do not call you servants any longer ... but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15)

Day 5: Letting oneself be transformed by the Word: “You have already been pruned by the word...” (Jn 15:3)

Day 6: Welcoming others: “Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16b)

Day 7: Growing in unity: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15:5a)

Day 8: Reconciling with all of creation: “So that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11)

Introduction to the Liturgical Celebration

This celebration reflects the ways in which the sisters of Grandchamp pray. In this tradition three of the monastic prayer services – sometimes called ‘vigils’ or ‘nocturns’ in the Benedictine tradition– traditionally said during the night are combined into one evening service. In the same way, our service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is shaped by three sections, called ‘vigils’, which follow a pattern used by the community of Grandchamp.

Each vigil follows the same pattern: readings from scripture; a sung response; a time of silence; and intercessions. Each vigil also has an action reflecting its theme; these are outlined below. Each ends with the singing of *Light of God (Lumière de Dieu)*, composed by a member of the community of Grandchamp.

The first vigil is centred on the unity of the whole person and our abiding in Christ. Participants are invited to five minutes of silence. These moments are repeated throughout the celebration.

The second vigil expresses the desire to rediscover the visible unity of Christians. Anchored in the love of Christ, we turn to our neighbours and exchange with each other a sign of his peace.

The third vigil opens us up to the unity of all peoples, all creation. The action in it is inspired by a text of Dorotheus of Gaza (see introduction). Several people are positioned around a circle, and move towards the centre. The closer we move to God - the centre - the closer we draw to each other.

There is a variety of ways in which this action may be choreographed depending on the space being used, and the traditions of those involved. The following may serve as a guide:

- Each person in the congregation will need to have an unlit candle.
- Organisers may wish to consider whether it is possible for the congregation to be “in the round” with radial aisles to facilitate this action.
- A large, raised lit candle (for example the Easter candle in many traditions) is set as the central point of a circle.
- Six to eight people from different Christian traditions surround the candle in a circle that may be outlined on the ground, or shaped by the congregation’s sitting in the round.
- Each of these people carries a small unlit candle raised high so all can see.
- During the reading accompanying the action (see p. 17), each person in the circle takes steps at the same pace towards the centre.
- When they reach the centre they light their unlit candles and return to the congregation. Everyone’s candle is then lit.
- During the lighting of the congregation’s candles, *Lumière de Dieu (Light of God)* is sung.
- Everyone holds their lighted candle through to the Dismissal. In some places, where it is appropriate and practicable, the congregations may process out of the place of worship into the wider world, with candles lit.

The litany at the beginning can be read or sung – if possible, by two different people. The psalms can also be read or sung, or replaced by a hymn related to the theme of the vigil. The responses during the prayers of

intercession can be read, sung or replaced by others. The intercessions can be prolonged by adding time for free prayer. Musical settings of the litany, responses and intercessions used at Grandchamp can be found on pp. 19-22. Hymns can be accessed and heard on the website of the Community of Grandchamp: www.grandchamp.org.

You can also listen to their common prayer online every day at: www.grandchamp.org/prier-avec-nous